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ABSTRACT

Noting the National Reading Panel's suggestions on assessing and improving children's phonemic awareness, this paper discusses how reading can be improved through think-alouds and visualizations. Comprehension strategies that teachers can model during think-alouds are: activating prior knowledge; building vocabulary; determining importance; questioning and clarifying; inferring; and synthesizing. Proficient readers create images in their minds as they read, and teachers can guide young readers to do the same. To help students visualize as they read, a teacher can start with simple sentences and ask students questions that help create images. Guiding students with detailed questions that lead to open-ended answers helps them create a visual interpretation of the sentence. This activity not only encourages students to create imagery, but also encourages them to think about questioning and become question askers themselves. (PM)

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Get That Brain Reading

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Letter Knowledge and Phonemic Awareness

The report of the National Reading Panel states that "Correlational studies have identified phonemic awareness and letter knowledge as the best school-entry predictors of how well children will learn to read during their first two years in school."

Alphabet mastery is a must: unhesitating mastery of the alphabet. Can they touch and name the letters as quickly backwards as they can forwards? Can they identify both upper and lowercase letters automatically? If there is any hesitation, it will impede their reading progress.

Phonemic awareness - Can the students focus on and manipulate the 41 phonemes in the English language?

Here are 6 tasks from the National Reading Panel that can be used to assess children's phonemic awareness or to improve phonemic awareness through practice.

1. Phoneme isolation, which requires recognizing individual sounds in words, for example, "Tell me the first sound in paste." (/p/)
2. Phoneme identity , which requires recognizing the common sound in different words. For example, "Tell me the sound that is the same in bike, boy, and bell." (/b/)
3. Phoneme categorization, which requires recognizing the word with the odd sound in a sequence of three or four words, for example, "Which word does not belong? bus, bun, rug." (rug)
4. Phoneme blending, which requires listening to a sequence of separately spoken sounds and combining them to form a recognizable word. For example, "What word is /s/ /k/ /u/ /l/?" (school)
5. Phoneme segmentation, which requires breaking a word into its sounds by tapping out or counting the sounds or by pronouncing and positioning a marker for each sound. for example, "How many phonemes are there in ship?" (three: /š/ /I/ /p/)
6. Phoneme deletion, which requires recognizing what word remains when a specified phoneme is removed. For example, "What is smile without the /s/?" (mile)

Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read, reprinted by The Partnership for Reading, December 2000.

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Understanding Text

How do good readers derive meaning from text? Good readers are constantly monitoring their own comprehension and are thinking about what they need to do to understand the text. They are metacognitive - aware of their own comprehension.

One strategy teachers can use to help all readers become metacognitive is the Teacher Think Aloud. Think Alouds give teachers the chance to ""unpack our brain and show kids all the things that go on in our heads as we read." *The Reading Teacher*, vol.55, p674. "Modeling (thinking processes) is an essential, inestimably important step in helping children observe and then use the mental processes used by proficient readers." Ellin Keene, Mosaic of Thought

Comprehension Strategies To Model during Teacher Think Alouds:

- activating prior knowledge
- building vocabulary
- determining importance
- questioning and clarifying
- inferring
- synthesizing

How to Conduct a Teacher Think Aloud

- Before reading the book to the class, decide which strategy will be the focus of the session.
- Go through the book to determine appropriate places to pause for personal commentary related to the focus strategy. Plan how you will demonstrate the use of that strategy.
- When introducing the book, explain that you will be stopping to share your thoughts.
- Read the book first without interruption and then do the Think Aloud on subsequent readings.
- During various Think Alouds, focus on different strategies.
- If focusing on background knowledge, select parts of the story that connect with your personal experiences (test-to-text connection), that connect with other literary works (text-to-text connection), and that connect with events and life in general (text-to-world connection).
- Stop at these chosen spots and share your thoughts with the children. When the reading is complete, invite the children to share their thoughts.
- When the children are engaged in their own reading, guide them to use the strategies that have been modeled for them.

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Visualization

Proficient readers create images in their minds as they read. Visualization is a natural part of reading for them. Poor readers, for various reasons, are not able to connect to the text in that way. They have not learned to make movies in their minds.

To help students visualize as they read, start with a simple sentence and ask the students questions that help create images.

example: "Jenny is watering the plants."

Who is this about?
How old is Jenny?
How tall is she?
What is she wearing?
What color hair does she have?
What kind of mood is she in?
Where is she?
Why is she watering the plants?
How many plants are there?
What kind of plants are they?
How is she watering them?
What season of the year is it?
What is the weather like?

Guiding students with detailed questions that lead to open-ended answers helps them create their own visual interpretation of the sentence. It transforms a simple sentence into a complete scene. When they are comfortable working with a single sentence, move on to a paragraph and then to a whole page of text.

This activity not only encourages students to create imagery, but also encourages them to think about questioning and become questions askers themselves.

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Mary Had a Little Lamb

Mary	right hand to left shoulder
had a	left hand to right shoulder
little	right hand to right hip
lamb.	left hand to left hip
It's fleece	right hand to left knee
was white	left hand to right knee
as snow.	clap
And	both hands on hips
Every	right hand to left shoulder
where that	left hand to right shoulder
Mary	right hand to right hip
went	left hand to left hip
the lamb	right hand to left knee
was sure	left hand to right knee
to go.	clap

Gloria Lapin 2001

People Learn
10% of what they read.
20% of what they hear.
30% of what they see.
50% of what they both see and hear.
70% of what they say and talk.
90% of what they say as they do a thing.
Ekwall and Shanker, 1988
95% of what they teach someone else.
William Glaner, 1990

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